

Dan Devine and I joined the faculty of the University of Missouri-Columbia the same year, 1958. Not much attention was paid to this fact. His arrival, of course, was headline news while mine was announced in the customary brief press release and produced a few words of welcome from local realtors and bankers. Both of us, however, hoped to make substantial contributions to the development of the University. He hoped to restore Missouri football to the top ranks; I hoped to develop a significant teaching and research program in recent United States history. No one could now doubt that he has succeeded, and I believe the program in recent U.S. history has moved forward rather well.

Does this brief outline of two careers, one athletic, the other academic, suggest that the two do not conflict? Can we build a great university at the same time that we are moving to the front in college football? Or are the two at war with one another?

The answer, I would suggest, depends upon the quality of the people involved in these different parts of university life. They are not inherently incompatible.

I would not deny that there are conflicts between the athletic and the academic sides of university life. Both consume time, and the time consumed by one is not available for the other. While football scholarships open intellectual opportunities for some boys who would otherwise be denied them, participation in football prevents many from developing as fully intellectually as they might had they been free of practicing, playing, planning, and worrying about football. Looking back on a very disappointing game also gets in the way. I have known athletes who could have accomplished much more in my classes if football had not imposed such great demands upon them, and I suspect that nearly every football player who fails academically does so because he does not devote enough of himself to his studies.

Some coaches do not deserve their positions as faculty members. Some make negative rather than positive contributions to academic life. I refer to those who are brutal, vulgar dictators and who corrupt academic life (and the life of the nation) by preaching that there is no substitute for victory, drawing into college boys who should not be there, treating the players as mercenaries or slaves, pressuring faculty members in hopes of obtaining passing grades for a valuable member of the team, and losing interest in a player's progress toward a degree once his playing days come to an end.

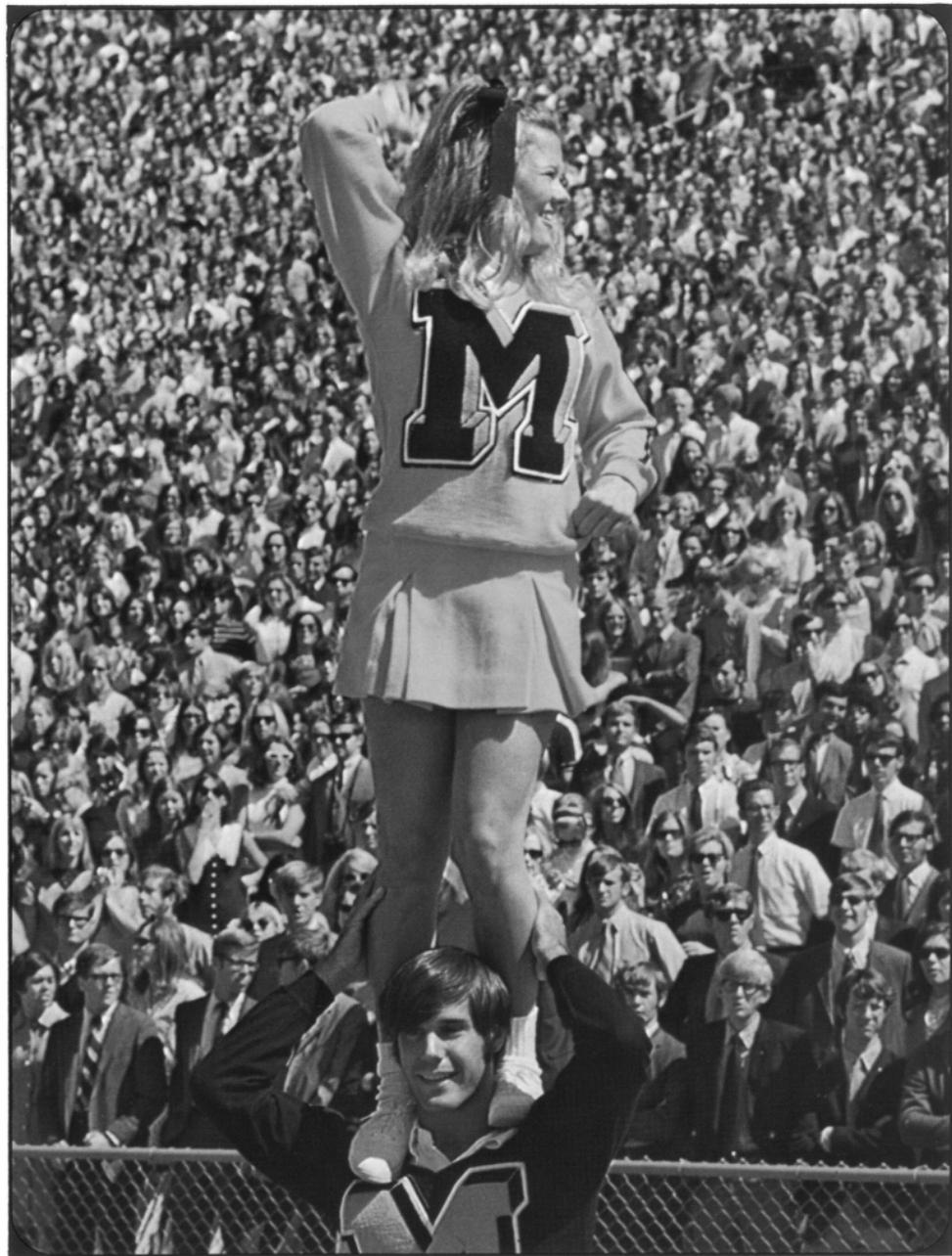
Under such leadership, football clearly clashes with the most important part of university life, the intellectual side. Universities rest upon assumptions about the intellectual results that flow from contacts among people of different backgrounds. Intellectual diversity and the exchange of ideas are the key concepts here. Classrooms provide opportunities for diverse people to come together and exchange ideas, but other parts of universities, including dormitories, function in similar ways.

In some football programs, the athletes are deprived of valuable intellectual opportunities. They are segregated in special dorms, forced to spend an excessive amount of time with people who share their unusually strong interest in football, and cut off most of the time from students with different interests and from the rich conversation that some students can supply. Their intellectual growth is hampered just as lack of sleep, an inadequate diet, or the use of drugs would harm their physical development.

One of the requirements of greatness in a university is the free exchange of ideas. It is the basic requirement. And the free exchange of ideas implies freedom of expression. Every member of a university community must be free to express his ideas as long as he does not express himself in violent, disruptive ways. (Rioters, like censors, are enemies of the university.)

Can
A Great University
Live With
**BIG-
TIME**
Football

By Richard S. Kirkendall



Some football programs conflict with this theory of university life. The men in charge of such programs refuse to allow their athletes to express some of the ideas that are most important to them, such as their hostility toward racism. Participation in any demonstration, however orderly and peaceful, or any word of protest leads to dismissal from the team and loss of a scholarship. These football players are not free to behave like students in a great university. "After I quit," one former California football player testified, "... I felt free to be a person, to move toward humanistic expression."

Tiger coaches don't pressure faculty.

But how does all of this relate to Missouri football and the aspirations of the Columbia campus? Missouri coaches do not recruit many boys who should not go to college. (All of the football players I have known here have been intelligent enough to succeed in college, and I was not surprised to read in a recent issue of the *Kansas City Star* that one Tiger player was making an A in English and a B in Philosophy.) Missouri coaches do not impose pressures on faculty members. Missouri does not have an athletic dorm. Missouri football players enjoy freedom of expression. (Jon Stagers, for example, felt free to criticize race relations in Columbia on national television.) And Missouri football teams are enormously successful!

These facts support my major themes: Football and academic life are not inherently incompatible, and the relationships between the two depend upon the quality of the people involved in them. Coaches do not need to behave in ways that are out of harmony with greatness in a university in order to produce winning football teams; football can prosper without harming the most important part of the university if the coaches have an adequate amount of respect for the intellectual life of the community and for the human beings who play the game. The evidence suggests that Dan Devine and his lieutenants are men of this quality.

So far, I have been looking almost exclusively at only one side of the story. I have emphasized only one small segment of the student body, the

football players. But what about the much larger part? Does not football divert the attention of these people away from more important activities? Do they not suffer intellectually because they are encouraged to applaud a small band of highly skilled athletes and coaches on Saturday afternoons and to talk about them during the remainder of the week? Does not the glorification of physical activity lead to the denigration of intellectual activity?

Evidence can be found to support these criticisms. Football does have a large anti-intellectual dimension, and it does dominate some campuses. And we do not need to accept some of the claims for it that have been made to counter the criticisms. We should doubt, for example, that it saves libraries by providing healthy outlets for tensions.

Football does provide outlets for tensions. It does draw attention away from other matters. This, however, can be a virtue. Everyone needs diversions. Even the President of the United States needs to move away at times from his emotionally and intellectually demanding pursuits. James Reston recently chided those who criticize President Nixon's love of football "in a tone that suggests he should stay home and cut the White House lawn."

Football has demonstrated its ability to provide excitement and enjoyment for large numbers of people, as well as presidents. One commentator suggests that sport is "the one major social institution that can be guaranteed to provide surprises. . . ." It is "full of the unexpected: unpredictable reversals of form, minute but crucial bits of good or bad luck." Football can be fun, at least for those who watch, and it need not consume an excessive amount of their time.

Football can build bridges across some of the gulfs that divide . . .

Football is also an often enjoyable and exciting diversion that can draw together people who are otherwise separated in a large, complex university. It can supply them with a sense of identification and an experience they can share and discuss. Perhaps a college president went too far when he praised football for taking "hold of the emotions of the students in such a way as to make class distinctions relatively unimportant" and for making "the students get together in the old-fashioned democratic way." But football can build bridges

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across some of the gulfs, such as the racial gulf, that divide members of the community. In some places, the sport remains a segregated institution, but that is no longer true of Missouri. We have even discarded recently some of the remnants of our "Jim Crow" past, such as "Dixie."

Furthermore, football is not unfair competition. Intellectual pursuits can compete successfully against it. There is evidence of this on the Columbia campus as well as other places.

Once again we are driven back to the question of the quality of the people involved. If a university contains inspiring teachers, then it will not be overwhelmed by football. The sport will fall into its proper place as an exciting and entertaining diversion, and intellectual life will be seen as so exciting and satisfying that it will be recognized as the most important part of the university.

Bowls create 'image' problems.

Dramatic events, such as the Tigers' frequent appearances in bowl games, do create an "image" problem for a university. Although the sport has long been praised for its public relations role — for its ability to broaden interest in a school, bowl games and the like can suggest to the public that a particular university is a "football school," interested only in the clashes that occur on the gridiron, and the public can conclude that only that aspect of university life is worthy of substantial support. Apparently, some people do believe that a university exists only to field a football team and to provide an occasion for a rolling party. But here again we reach the question of quality. The people inside the university must skillfully project beyond the boundaries of the campus a sense of the significance of their activities, and the people outside the university must be sufficiently sophisticated to recognize and appreciate the value of the intellectual vitality, diversity and freedom of a great university.

Sports Illustrated suggested that Ol' Mizzou's "dominant culture remains beer drinking and football loving," but I doubt this generalization. If football does dominate the spirit of a university, if a school revolves around football, then some people in it or associated with it are failures. Perhaps the students or the faculty members or the administrators are to blame. Or perhaps the fault lies with the people upon whom the institution depends for financial support.

In the area of finances, there is potential conflict between football and the hope of building a great university in Missouri. The academic and the

Football should be self-supporting.

athletic sides have been hit simultaneously by serious financial problems. At the same time that universities are encountering renewed opposition to spending on higher education, football programs are facing rapidly rising costs. The latter problem could generate damaging conflict if football tries to solve its financial problems by draining away funds that are needed elsewhere. Football could block efforts to build a great University of Missouri if funds were diverted away from the library, for example. The library is one of the most valuable and most distinguished parts of the Columbia campus, but it faces serious problems that can be solved only by a substantial increase in financial support. A library is, of course, a more important part of a university than a football team.

The way to avoid conflict is to seek solutions to football's financial problems that are in line with football's tradition of self-support. Football has, in fact, financed most athletic programs. Perhaps the proposal to increase the number of games should be accepted. (We would not seek to imitate Harvard of 1882 which played a 28-game schedule!) Other possibilities are another increase in the price of tickets and additional TV exposure. Hopefully, the new auditorium will enable the other sports to make larger financial contributions. (Norm Stewart's basketball teams seem certain to fill the place.) In seeking solutions to football's financial problems, men of high quality will be guided by a proper sense of the relative importance of the different parts of the University.

Big-time football has not stunted our intellectual growth.

Devotees of the life of the mind need not despair when they see the Tigers drive to a nine-and-two season and sixth place among the nation's football powers. Rather than attack football, they should step up their efforts to move the University generally to such a high position. At the same time, those of us who are so inclined can continue to enjoy the kind of football that has been available for a decade. It has not stunted our intellectual growth. □